

VZCZCXRO9220  
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA  
DE RUEHOS #0673/01 1381010  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 181010Z MAY 06  
FM AMCONSUL LAGOS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7167  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 0153  
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0353  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR PRIORITY 0739  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 1057  
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000673

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE PASS FAA FOR ACONLEY,  
TRANSPORTATION FOR FAA; DAKAR PLEASE PASS TO FAA REP ED  
JONES; ROME PLEASE PASS TO TSA REP JOHN HALINSKI

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [EINV](#) [PREL](#) [KFRD](#) [ATRA](#) [NI](#)  
SUBJECT: NORTH AMERICAN AIRLINES TO START DIRECT LAGOS-NY  
ROUTE

-----  
Summary  
-----

¶1. (SBU) North American Airlines (NAA) has received final GON approval to start direct service from Lagos to New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK). The airline plans to begin flights some time between June 26 and July 17, with the latter date being more probable. NAA informally requested consular and DHS assistance during the first two weeks of the flight to handle document checks and assist with safety and security issues. End Summary.

-----  
NCAA Gives NCAA Final Approval to Establish Route  
-----

¶2. (SBU) After a few minor bureaucratic delays, NAA received authorization from the Aviation Ministry (MOA) and Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) to begin a direct route between Nigeria and the United States.

¶3. (SBU) At a meeting with EconCouns, the Aviation Minister regretted the misunderstandings that led to his predecessor's rejection of Continental Airlines' request for a direct route pursuant to the bilateral Open Skies agreement. The Minister hoped Continental would reconsider the Nigerian market, and he welcomed other U.S. airlines as well. The Minister also told EconCouns he was very interested in technical assistance to improve air safety and security and hoped postponed Department of Transportation and Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) visits would be rescheduled in the near future. The MOA is also discussing programs with the World Bank under its regional initiative.

-----  
NAA Asks for Consular Assistance  
-----

¶4. (U) In a conversation with Mission officers, NAA Vice President for Passenger Sales, Bob Perry, requested Department of Homeland Security and TSA assistance during the first two weeks of the new flight, at a minimum. He asked for consular assistance with document inspection at the point of embarkation as well as document training for NAA employees from the Lagos Consular section as well. NAA has hired Aviation Logistics and Management Ltd. to handle their

security and document checking. They will employ Israeli trainers and intend to have 20 security agents doing hand searches and screenings at the airport. (Note. Post's assessment of NAA's request for consular and other assistance will be provided septel. End Note.)

-----  
NAA Committed to Local Content and Customer Service  
-----

15. (U) Affirming NAA's commitment to local content, Perry admitted that identifying indigenous talent had not been easy. Nevertheless, NAA has been asking their service providers, including accountants, hotels, etc., for referrals and NAA continues to make every effort to hire Nigerians, he stated. NAA expected to hire at least 15 local staff.

16. (U) NAA plans to use electronic ticketing exclusively, despite the risks associated with credit cards in Nigeria. They made an arrangement with the United Bank of Africa (UBA) so that passengers without U.S. credit cards can either pay for tickets at bank branches or by debit card through the widely available Interswitch platform. NAA Vice President for Sales, Peter Bogovich, said the company had done trial runs using Air France's on-line system and felt NAA's ticketing plan was appropriate for Nigeria. Perry said NAA had been asked by the Ministry to consider a code-share agreement with either Virgin Nigeria Airways (VN) or another Nigerian carrier. NAA originally attempted to team with Bellview Airlines; however, Bellview's only input so far has been an agreement to reschedule flights so their domestic connections would harmonize with NAA flights and to function as a travel agent to sell NAA tickets. In return, NAA would sell Bellview tickets. NAA confirmed they belong to the same

LAGOS 00000673 002 OF 002

holding company that owns World Airways, which ran an unsuccessful Lagos-JFK route in the past. NAA claimed to operate independently from World.

-----  
NAA to Use Boeing 767-300ER Three Times Per Week  
-----

17. (U) For this route, NAA purchased a 1996 Boeing 767-300ER model plane from KLM Airlines, and removed rows in the economy class section for added room. Pilots and crew will be all American, except for three flight attendants and one Ghanaian pilot. The return flight will operate three thrice weekly, beginning Monday, leaving Lagos at 11:55 a.m. and arriving JFK at 6:25 p.m. the same day. The flight will leave JFK at 3:00 p.m. and arrive Lagos at 6:45 a.m. the next day. NAA is satisfied with the times, because there are very few international flights at MMIA in the morning. NAA will consider a route from Abuja once Lagos has been satisfactorily established.

18. (U) NAA currently operates an all economy charter between Accra and JFK once weekly. Starting June 3, they plan to switch to thrice weekly flights that include business class accommodations. They hope to commence a direct flight from Banjul to JFK in June also. NAA does not have a mileage plan, nor any codeshare agreements, but will provide travellers with connection options on Jet Blue.

-----  
Comment  
-----

19. (SBU) That NAA has gotten approval demonstrates the change in policy that has taken form since the current Aviation Minister was appointed last year. This cannot be solely attributed to the pro-American posture of the Minister nor to a newly found respect for the Open Skies agreement. By opening the door for NAA in Nigeria, the GON hopes to lessen opposition to VN's request to fly directly from Nigeria into

the American market. At bottom, a direct NAA flight will mark a major achievement for a ministry beset by two major crashes and undergoing a near total restructuring in the last 6 months. While some delay in preparation can be expected, NAA will likely be able to start service in July. End Comment.

¶10. (U) This cable was cleared by Embassy Abuja.  
BROWNE